

Interview with Carmen Bianco and Loriann Hoffmann

Episode 11

As a leader, talk is cheap. Action is what counts and practice makes a difference. Below are practical steps to improve performance.

- **Practice the Preemptive Strike Approach with your Board of Directors.** Leaders often coach their employees to abide by the mantra “No Surprises”, so give your board members the same courtesy by giving them a heads-up in advance of bad news or controversial decisions you plan to present at the Board meeting. Giving them an opportunity to react outside of the meeting and formulate their thoughts and questions ahead of time helps them to show up better at those meetings, which would be appreciated by anyone.
- **Practice stated appreciation.** This one continues to show up in interviews with our guests, so maybe it's time to start paying attention and putting it into practice. And don't let the virtual workspace or hybrid work model be an excuse not to recognize an employee. You can text, email, call or videoconference a positive and genuine note to anyone with ease these days, and the goodwill you receive will be far greater than the effort you put in.
- **Define your own Core Values.** By now, we assume your company has its own set of Core Values that (hopefully) are alive and well in your company, evident in everything from your systems and processes to the behavior of everyone wearing the company logo.

But have you taken the time to define YOUR OWN Core Values? What really matters to you? What are your non-negotiables, and have you communicated them to those around you? What behaviors give further insight and definition to your Core Values so you and others can model them? Take on the challenge of living your own personal Core Values. You'll find greater peace and inner alignment when you do.

- **Don't let the job take over your life!** Yeah, we know this one's easier said than done, but there aren't many companies in the world that would stop you from working harder and sacrificing your own personal life (and family) in support of your leadership role. Therefore, you must be the one to draw the boundaries and respect them yourself first if you hope to ask your company to do the same. As Leb says, “If it's not working at home, it's not working”.
 - **Get personal with your people to learn their stories.** Gather them together and let them share who they are, what their challenges are outside of work, what matters to them, memorable events in their lives, and how they became who they've become. There are so
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many great questions you could ask that invite your teams to open up with each other. Be warned: you'll most likely need to lead by example, but exercises like this often become the glue that cements teams together forever. And cemented teams achieve more and overcome the setbacks and obstacles that shatter simple workgroups.

- **Start small, then communicate, communicate, communicate!** Rome wasn't built in a day, and a couch potato doesn't run a marathon on the first day of training. Find ways to break large, seemingly insurmountable projects or goals into bite-sized chunks, then keep everyone informed of the Vision, the why behind it, the goals, the tasks, the progress being made (successes AND failures), the people involved, and anything else you can think of to build trust through transparency. Step by step, you will move forward.
- **Find your tribe!** In any takeover, turnaround or change initiative, some of the hardest days are often in the beginning when you seem to be the only one pulling in the new direction. The sooner you find kindred spirits and change agents who are as enthusiastic and ready for change as you, the sooner you'll have additional shoulders to lean on when you, yourself, get weary. As Patrick say, "You'll exhaust more energy in a one-hour sit-down with someone who sucks the life out of you than you will in an all-day working session with someone who shares your passion". Find your tribe.
- **Remember you're only as good as the sum of the parts around you.** Unless you plan to do everything yourself, you've got to build a great team around you, then empower them to bring your Vision into reality. You're simply the conductor of the orchestra, but you'll never make music without musicians.
- **Meet people where they are and engage them in ways that make them feel valued.** Listen, change initiatives are hard for most people, so don't expect everyone to cheerlead the changes. Even so, you need to meet everyone where they are and find ways to engage them that are meaningful to them. Make them part of the process!
- **Lean on the 4 Pillars Carmen Bianco used to transform New York City Transit: Fairness, Respect, Trust, and I've Got Your Back.** Model them first, then demand these from others, and you will create the fabric of a great organization culture.

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